Supreme Court Establishes Guardian Ad Litem Phone Line, Conducts Training Remotely
For immediate release Monday, April 20, 2020

CHARLESTON, W.Va. – Anyone with a complaint, concern or compliment about a guardian *ad litem* working on a child abuse and neglect case can now call a dedicated phone number at the Supreme Court of Appeals of West Virginia. Concerned individuals also can send information in writing to a dedicated email address.

The Court Improvement Program, (CIP), part of the Supreme Court's Division of Children and Juvenile Services, also has launched virtual training series for guardians *ad litem* and circuit judges.

Emails and calls to the Child Abuse and Neglect-Guardian Ad Litem Phone Line will be received and logged by a designated staff person in the Division of Children and Juvenile Services. The information will be reviewed by the Director of the Division, Cindy Largent-Hill, who will address problems, make referrals, or pass along information as needed.

"We would also like to gather positive information as well as complaints. If a foster family or other individual has a really good interaction with a guardian *ad litem*, we would like to hear about that, too," she said.

No legal advice will be given.

The phone number is 681-587-9912. The email address is wvgal.can@courtswv.gov

The dedicated phone line and email address is being funded by the CIP, which uses federal funds to work on projects related to child abuse and neglect in West Virginia.

The CIP also has begun holding virtual training sessions for guardians *ad litem*. During the first session, held April 16, Morgantown attorney Kristen Antolini explained how to use technology to check on children, how to do interactive activities with children via computer, and how to facilitate a virtual sibling visitation. This was timely information due limitations on in-person visits during the COVID 19 pandemic.

"Since the guardians are not currently in court as often, this is an opportunity to provide training," said Ms. Largent-Hill. "We had so much momentum on this topic coming out of the legislative session we don't want to lose progress because of the COVID-19 virus."

Chief Justice Tim Armstead said, "Guardians *ad litem* play an incredibly important role in protecting our children. The Court is committed to improve the guardian

ad litem process*,* and to help facilitate the guardians' interaction with children, foster families and other stakeholders, particularly in abuse and neglect cases."

The Division of Children and Juvenile Services also has begun conducting "Lunch and Learn" online information-sharing sessions for circuit judges. The first one-hour session, held on April 14 and repeated on April 17, focused on the Department of Health and Human Services' "Safe at Home" program. The program provides wraparound services in the home and community for children who, without such services, are at risk of being removed from their homes in a subsequent child abuse and neglect, delinquency or status offense case.

More lunch-hour online information-sharing sessions are planned.

##

Supreme Court of Appeals
State of West Virginia

News